



# Partnerships Handbook

A guide to good place-keeping



the  
place  keeping  
group



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This handbook is based on findings from a research project carried out in 2014 and funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council.



The quotes you read throughout the handbook are from interviewees we talked to in 2014 as part of this research project.”

# We need to talk about partnerships!

## Partnership.

Ask anyone about how to work effectively and they're bound to say *work with someone else* or *work in a team*.

## But what do we actually know about partnerships?

- \* Do they always work?
- \* What makes a good partnership?
- \* What makes a bad partnership?
- \* Are there good partners and bad partners?

## The place-keeping team set out to find the answers.

We looked at open space management partnerships across Sheffield which bring together community groups, public, private and third sector organisations.

We conducted a 12 month project where we talked to partners and asked about their opinions and experiences of what does and what doesn't work well in partnerships.



# What is place-keeping?

*Place-keeping* is looking after and managing green and open spaces for the enjoyment of all users, today and in the future.

Most partnerships focus on *place-making* – the creating, the regenerating, the physical changes to a place. Place-making partnerships form to raise large sums of money for new equipment, replacing damaged materials and 'fixing up' places.

But what happens afterwards? Who maintains and manages the place once it's 'finished'? Who looks after it for the long term? Do partnerships stay interested?

Too often, places fall into disrepair through neglect and poor management because *place-keeping* doesn't happen. Place-keeping needs to be considered right from the beginning, during the place-making stage. This is to make sure that the regenerated park, new playground or attractive planting scheme is well-looked after and highly valued in the future from the moment the contractors leave the site.

Place-keeping involves a number of inter-related aspects:

## Partnership

How do people work together to do place-keeping?

## Funding

How is place-keeping funded over the long term to achieve good value?

## Design and Management

How does the design affect how a place is managed?

## Governance

Who makes decisions about the place and who is responsible for it?

## Policy

How is long-term place-keeping supported/hindered in local and national policy?

## Evaluation

How is place-keeping in practice measured? What is 'good place-keeping'?

## Coordination

How are all of these aspects successfully brought together in practice?

# What are place-keeping partnerships?

Place-keeping partnerships happen when people work together to look after their open spaces. This often involves public, private and/ or community sector organisations. This might be a local authority working with a Friends group of a local park, or a formal contract between a city council and private contractor to manage numerous green spaces.

## What do place-keeping partnerships do?

Place-keeping activities fall into two broad categories.

### FACILITATING place-keeping:

- \* campaigning
- \* awareness raising
- \* developing green space strategies

### DELIVERING place-keeping:

- \* ongoing maintenance including litter picks, graffiti removal, vegetation clearing, equipment repairs
- \* organising events
- \* fundraising

The *scale* of the site and the place-keeping activity has an important influence on what a partnership does. For example, community groups may fundraise and organise events in a local park and report any problems, but be unwilling to engage in whole-scale park management.



# Why are partnerships good for place-keeping?

## Partnership working means...

### Decision-makers are more likely to listen

A united voice can help lobby for change: there is strength in numbers.

### Good appropriate design

A joined-up and inclusive design process which involves users can create well-designed and well-loved places.

### Greater resources

Different partners can access different resources, including pots of money. Pooling resources such as knowledge and ideas as well as funding can bring extra value beyond individual partner contributions.

### Good decision-making

Responsibility can be shared among all partners, openly and inclusively. Those who use the open/ green space should be able to voice opinions and be represented fairly and democratically.

### Evaluation that is useful

A better-informed understanding of what successful place-keeping means can help shape and join up partners' perspectives.



...all partnerships are vital to working in a green space... the council might own the land, but the community uses the land and it wouldn't be a nice environment if we got to a place where there was no involvement with the community...listening to the community in that way brings benefits..."



# This partnership is great!

## Shared vision

Everyone in the partnership has the same aims. The vision is re-visited regularly.

## Clear objectives

The partnership's aims are specific and clear to all partners.

## Good communication

Members are open/ clear about their aims and time commitments. Communication is regular.

## Sharing resources

Tools, skills and knowledge are shared. Partners apply for funding in a coordinated way.

## Building on existing capacity

The partnership enhances what partners are already doing - becoming stronger together.

## A can do attitude

Partners are motivated and positive about what can be achieved.

## Fundraising

Activities are planned and funded for the long term, not just 'one-off'.

## Continuity

Partners share skills and experience to ensure place-keeping continues if they leave.

## Events

Regular events bring in potential new members, raise funds and celebrate the partnership's achievements.

## Willingness to change


Partners challenge entrenched cultures, misaligned priorities and power-balance, and inflexible decision-making processes.

## Being patient


Partners acknowledge that things take time, and accept that there may be bureaucratic hoops to jump through. Partners aim for small achievements whilst working towards bigger goals.

## Mutual understanding and respect

Each partner understands their own priorities and limitations and those of others.



...Having a similar common goal, similar aspirations and making sure that you consult with the group and that you want to do the same things and go the same way... that builds the relationship."



...From my point of view, it was always about making involvement fun, so if someone comes out and volunteers, they would like to come out again."



# This partnership has problems – internally and externally!

## Lack of focus

Partnership is unclear about its remit and lacks clarity about what it can and cannot achieve.

## Different agendas

Partners have different aims and approaches and don't share with others.

## Lack of commitment/ unsustained motivation

Partners are enthusiastic in certain activities (e.g. meetings) but don't follow through with sustained action. Partners are reluctant to take on what they see as other people's responsibility.

## Lack of continuity

When people leave, skills and knowledge are lost.

## Time limited funding

Activity is always funding-led, and short term. There is no long term plan or approach, guided by overall vision and aims. When funding stops, so does activity.

## Inflexibility

Partners are 'stuck in their ways' and unwilling to change the status quo, e.g. their own working practices.

## Inward-looking

Other (local) groups with similar remits are ignored as the partnership focuses only on its own aims and activities. Group doesn't seek advice from others and is inevitably 'reinventing the wheel'.

## Negative attitudes

Things are considered too difficult and time-consuming. Partners raise and debate the issues/ problems rather than trying to resolve them constructively.

## Poor communication

Partners wrongly assume that everyone has the same information or that someone else will spread the word (e.g. about events).

## Low capacity

Partners are stretched for time and resources and not working effectively, particularly where partnerships are dependent on volunteers with other (work/ family) commitments.

## Lack of patience

Partnership does not acknowledge the considerable time that things take to happen. They lack understanding of how 'the system' works.



I think [partners] having different priorities is very difficult to manage, if you annoy someone they might not want to carry on working in that way. So in some ways it is about building that relationship and thinking let's help each other out."

# Checklist! Work through the following pages to assess the “health” of your place-keeping partnership.

Partnerships are ‘works in progress’. They are not always easy and require substantial time, commitment and energy. But when they work well, they can achieve great things.

This checklist allows you to think about your partnership’s current status to assess what it does well and what could be improved.

We have identified common issues which we discuss later in more detail. We hope this helps you reflect on what you do well and what could work better in your partnership.



# The Place-keeping Partnership Checklist

**Does your partnership have clear aims?**

Turn to page 11 to see if you have!

Yes  No  Not Sure

**Do you know the capacity of your partnership?**

Turn to page 12 to check your capacity!

Yes  No  Not Sure

**Do you and your partners have the time to do place-keeping well?**

Turn to page 14 for time management tips!

Yes  No  Not Sure

**Does your partnership have the right members?**

Turn to page 15 for how you might categorise your members!

Yes  No  Not Sure

**Do you have competitors?**

Turn to page 16 to think about who is in your place-keeping network!

Yes  No  Not Sure

**Do you know what kind of partnership you are?**

Turn to page 17 to find out!

Yes  No  Not Sure

**Do people know about you and your activities?**

Turn to page 18 for hints on communicating effectively!

Yes  No  Not Sure

**Do you know if you are successful?**

Turn to page 19 for identifying the positive signs!

Yes  No  Not Sure

# Does your partnership have clear aims?

Do you know what your place-keeping partnership is trying to achieve?

Without clear aims, how will others know what you are trying to achieve? Having a compelling 'vision' can be an effective tool for communication.

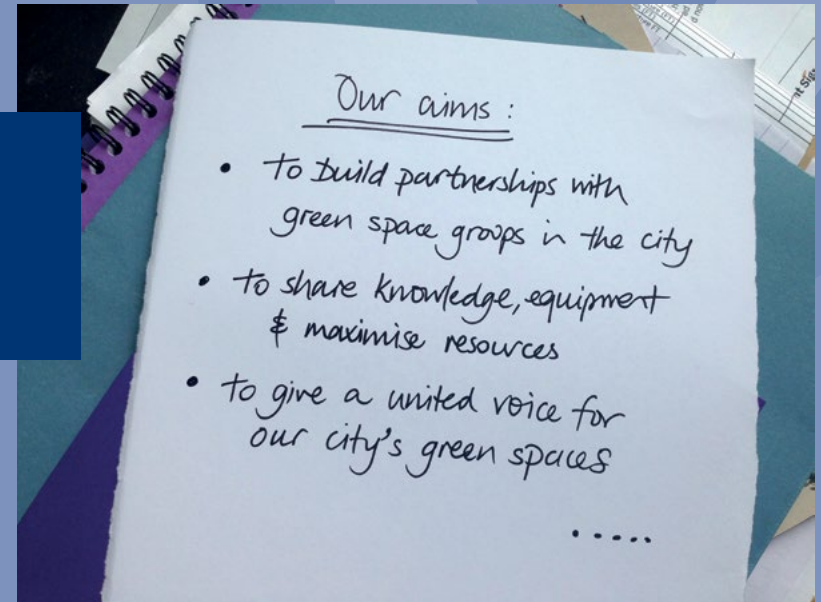
Good place-keeping partnerships use their clear aims to communicate their purpose to others, to guide their actions and monitor their progress. However, developing and agreeing shared aims is not easy.

Partnerships are groups of individuals, and whether representing themselves or an organisation, they have different motivations for being involved. This can cause difficulties in reaching agreement – particularly when the power balance is unequal, for example if one partner brings more resources than another. So it is important to be clear from the start about what the partnership collectively aims to achieve and have structures in place to address any barriers.

Place-keeping aims may change over time and so mechanisms are needed to review and agree changes.



“this is a community priority, that was the big driver for us”



Adapted from Sheffield's Green Space Forum

Can you capture what your partnership does in three aims?

# What is the capacity of your partnership?

Successful partnerships have high capacity.

By capacity, we mean a place-keeping partnership's ability to:

- \* develop and deliver its aims
- \* withstand and respond to internal and external changes – such as people moving on, or when funding applications don't materialise

It is not enough to just have an agreed vision and the right members.

Partnerships need to have the *capacity* to act and deliver those aims and sustain place-keeping over time.

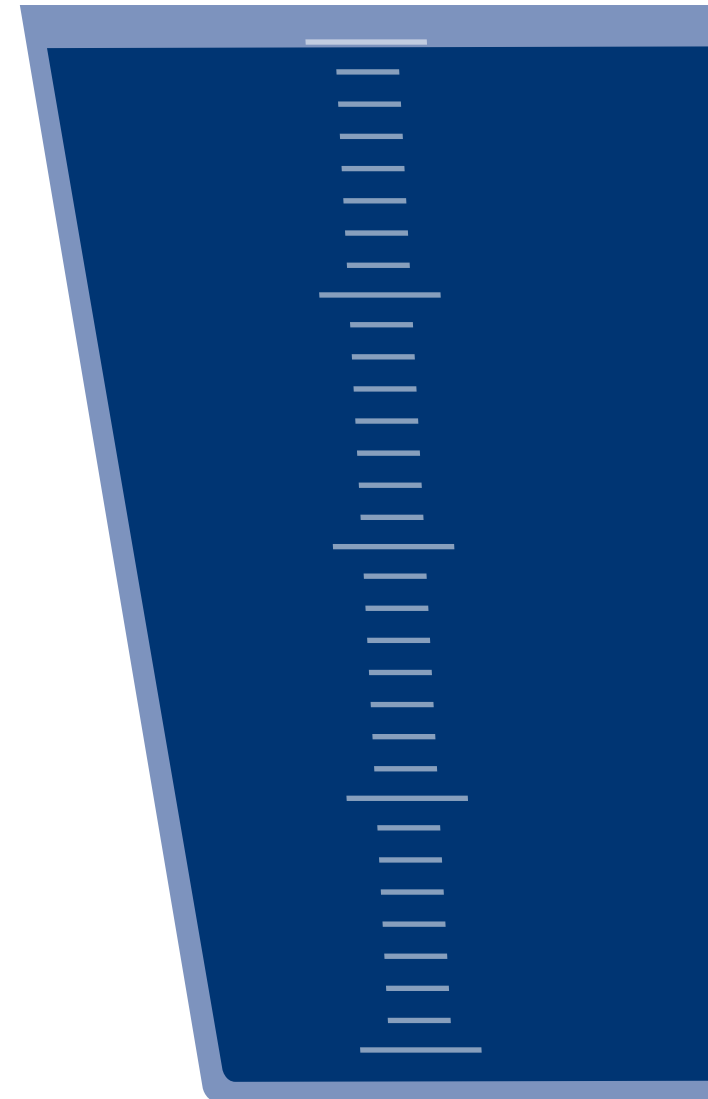
*Capacity is therefore about the motivation, communication, skills, commitment and political influence of the place-keeping partnership.*

With a better understanding of your partnership's capacity, you can identify areas of strength and weakness.

For example what can you do to increase your capacity? Do you need to adapt your aims? Or change your activities to play to your capacity strengths?



people were up for doing something and trying to change the area.. ”



# Where do the strengths and weaknesses of your place-keeping partnership lie?

## Motivation levels

What drives people to be part of the place-keeping partnership?  
Are there specific roles that specific people could do?

What does your partnership contribute to the site's development and management?  
Is it short- or long-term? Where might long-term funding come from?

## Financial Capital

## Commitment

How much time do partners spend in the partnership? How many partners work on developing and managing the site? How could you increase this?

How well do you communicate to members what the partnership is doing?  
And communicating beyond the partnership? What would help you do this better?

## Communication

## Political influence

Do all your partners have an influence over decisions in the partnership?  
What wider influence does your partnership have in the community/ town/ city?  
How could you increase your political influence?

What training and qualifications do partners have? What is the local knowledge of your partnership? Where would more training help your partnership?

## Skill base

# Do you and your partners have the time to do place-keeping well?

Place-keeping takes time. It's about thinking long term and understanding how places change over time. It takes time to build relationships and to gain trust. This can be made more difficult when people move on, when funding changes and when organisations restructure.

To do place-keeping well requires commitment from partners to be in it 'for the long haul' and also to be flexible so the partnership can change as place-keeping priorities change and a place matures and develops.

In practice, partners' involvement in place-keeping can vary over time and can depend on the type of activity. For example, it can rise and fall around specific projects or events.

The ideal situation is sustained involvement over time. Involving partners with long-term goals can help ensure the partnership lives beyond any one specific activity.

Regular events, such as fun days and summer fairs, can help drive partnership. Sporadic, unplanned activities and small, regular 'wins' such as litter picks can help maintain motivation.



# Does your partnership have the right members?

One of key challenges facing place-keeping partnerships is *recruiting* and *retaining* members.

Partnerships can be 'static' in their core membership and most rely on a few members who do all the work. So it is important to get the right partners on board from the start. Assessing your capacity and reviewing who your competitors are can help you identify new partners that will help deliver your aims.

When setting up, or reinvigorating your partnership, it can be useful to think of members as *voters*, *voices*, and *actors*.



*Voters* take part in decision making.



*Voices* contribute their views.



*Actors* contribute to delivery (e.g. helping to run an event).

Does your place-keeping activity depend on *actors* to manage a site, or rallying support from *voices* or *voters*? Understanding partners' motivations for being involved can help steer them to appropriate involvement in particular activities.

Leadership and contribution from highly motivated individuals (this may be you!) can inspire and drive action forward. But what happens if these people move on?

How representative is your partnership of your wider community? If your partnership is making decisions that affect others, how do you demonstrate transparency and representativeness?



And whether it is a partnership or coalition... I do think you need that leadership"

If individuals become dominant and cliques form, this can lead to undemocratic processes, preventing partnerships from adapting to necessary changes in aims and priorities. They can put off new members or lead to others quitting!

Remember that most people will not want to become a core member but will support a particular activity or event. Your partnership needs structures in place to deal with these potential issues; such as sharing responsibilities and knowledge, and processes guiding decision making and reviewing roles and responsibilities.



# Do you have competitors?

Resources for place-keeping are limited.

There is competition for funding, support from Council officers and volunteers.

Whether voluntary or not, your own partners have competing demands on their time. This means that working effectively, in a focused way, is vital to generating maximum impact from the resources you have – time, money and knowledge/skills.

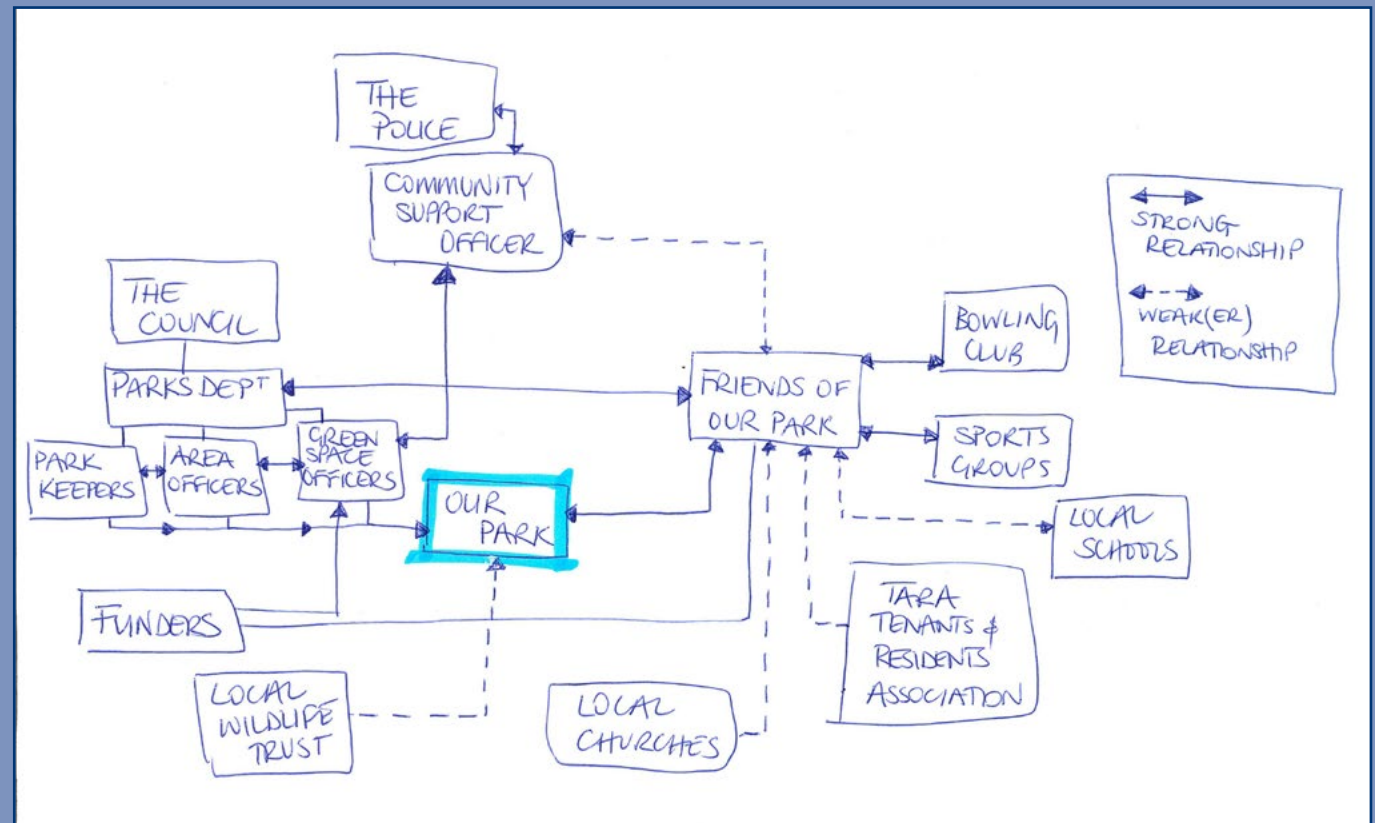
Place-keeping partnerships with strong networks tend to achieve more than those that do not. Who does your group work with or could work with? Are these potential partners based on your site, in your city or maybe at the national scale?

Who do you 'compete' with for resources? Can they be turned into allies and share resources?

Create a diagram of all those people/organisations involved in your place-keeping network like this one. You can categorise the links you have as:

- \* Strong
- \* Weak
- \* Formal
- \* Informal
- \* Potential

This will help you identify existing partners as well as any gaps in your network for potential partners or collaborators – those you may benefit from working with but are not part of your partnership.



# What kind of partnership are you?

Partnerships come in many shapes and sizes and it is useful to consider what is most suitable for your type of place-keeping activity. At a basic level, partnerships can be *formal* or *informal*.

Critical to the success of a partnership is that all partners share responsibility and have a clear role to play - they know what is expected of them. Having appropriate structures and agreements in place can help to ensure this. These may be more, or less, formal.

**Formal** partnerships can take longer to set up – partnership aims, scope and processes (e.g. members roles and responsibilities) are clearly stated. This can make it easier to see how well a partnership works and to take action if things go wrong. Formal partnerships may be needed when place-keeping involves taking on leases, securing funding bids, employing staff, delivering contracted work or contracting out work to others.

**Informal** partnerships can be quick and easy to set up, but it can take time to develop trust and the mutual understanding needed for effective running. Relying solely on partners' motivation can be a problem if things go wrong. Much voluntary place-keeping is undertaken through informal partnerships, such as Friends of groups working with Local Authorities.

No matter how formal or informal, the key to success is clarity. A lack of defined remit, agreed roles (e.g. leadership) and responsibilities of members can be a barrier to effective place-keeping. It is also important to have some flexibility to adapt as and when the partnership and place-keeping priorities evolve over time.



# Do people know about you and your activities?

Effective place-keeping partnerships are also effective communicators. They are good at both external and internal communication.

*External* communication is vital - if people do not know about you or what you do, how can they support you? There is no one, perfect way to get the message out there. Regularly using a range of different methods is usually required – communication is not a one-off activity. Your partnership needs to decide what is the most effective use of the time and resources it has. And don't be averse to learning new skills!

Consider the purpose of your communication and when it should best happen – e.g. before, during and after an event? Are you raising awareness of place-keeping activities? Recruiting new members? Or are you asking people to do something, e.g. volunteering for an event?

There are many different ways to communicate. Face-to-face communication is a very effective way of getting people actively involved. Social and regular media (radio, newspaper, TV) can be very good at raising awareness of your activities. All methods are dependent on people having the time and interest to do things

such as: website or Facebook updates, daily tweeting, writing press releases and interviews. Websites in particular can take time and money to set up and require effort to keep them updated and relevant.

Clear and transparent lines of *internal* communication is central for co-ordinating and maintaining healthy partnership working between partners. This can help develop trust, accountability and respect for each other's contributions. Communication can become more demanding as partnerships grow. More formal and complex partnerships can particularly benefit from a facilitator to help communication between partners and to reach agreement about new or changing aims and structures.

When it comes to communication, you need to be particularly clear about what influence responses will have. Are you just 'informing' people or can respondents expect to influence decisions? (check p.15 to see if you have the right members).

Communicating after the event, consultation or activity should not be forgotten – thank participants and shout about successes.



# Do you know if you are successful?

The success of a place-keeping partnership can be measured in two ways.

## 1. Indicators of quantity or quality of the place-keeping undertaken

e.g. the number of people attending an event, area of park improved or 'happy' park users. Your success can be measured against your partnership aims, action plan for the year, or management plan for your green space.

## 2. The effectiveness of the place-keeping partnership itself

e.g. does it retain and attract new members? Do people know about you and what your partnership does?

These types of evaluation (e.g. site surveys, user questionnaires, user counts and partnership health checks) are seldom undertaken, but can provide compelling evidence to support future activity such as funding for an event, or be used to identify and address issues that can improve the partnership's effectiveness. You might find that your activity has been driven by funding opportunities rather than delivering your core aims, or perhaps your aims need to change!

Place-keeping is dynamic and you need to have a process in place to evaluate your partnership activities to ensure they meet the changing needs of the green space, its users, and the changing economic and political context.



Remember that there weren't just one person involved, there might have been hundreds involved... All the money that we raised in this area was raised by people, and people that care...

*How will you tell people how well you have done?*

# Why partnerships matter for place-keeping

Here are some concluding quotes from our research here in Sheffield which we think put it better than we can!

...working with the community were certainly a driver for us, because otherwise it would be down to an individual's opinion about what needed doing...

there were loads of people who had been really energetic in getting involved in the design and the transformation of their parks but we knew that the ongoing [management] would be trickier...as it always is, isn't it?

...it was all about this shared learning...

...there was not really a connection between the groups... There was lots of people doing good stuff or not so good stuff but it really wasn't coordinated... we were aiming for a set of shared standards.

...we did lots of work with schools really to try and embed, you know, these sort of ideas about looking after your area... and young people having some ownership of the site and, you know, feeling that it was theirs...

...our parks are looked after and are cared for and I would say that a big part of that is that the community value those parks...

...I have taught the young 'un how to do it, but at my age I don't want to do it, the young ones have the young brains, they have got the good eyesight, they have got the ideas...

...there wasn't a good relationship between [them] particularly, it was a personal thing. She didn't like them and it caused a big schism...

We are a team of researchers based in the Department of Landscape at the University of Sheffield and have been researching place-keeping over the last decade. We talk to people involved in place-keeping, evaluate how it happens and share this knowledge and experiences through publications like this.

Place-keeping is all about looking after and managing open spaces for the enjoyment of all users, today and in the future. It's about ensuring the long-term and sustainable management of new and existing

places. Unfortunately, our research shows that we simply cannot assume that the designers, planners, creators and regenerators of spaces take into consideration the long-term future of places.

Partnership working has long been an important part of place-keeping, but we need to know more about how it happens in practice. We believe it is important to get partnerships right because they involve a lot of time, a lot of effort and a huge amount of patience.

This handbook is for people already in a place-keeping partnership or just starting out. It calls on research carried out in 2014 which was funded by the ESRC. We are very grateful for the hard work of our partners below who helped make this research as useful as possible.





We hope this handbook provides useful and relevant information to help you reflect on how successful your own partnership is and to recognise and avoid the pitfalls. Our focus was place-keeping, but these findings can apply to all partnership types.

Do get in touch and let us know if this is useful!

